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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 000265

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STATE FOR SCA/CEN, DRL

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SUBJECT: TAJIK POLITICAL PARTIES: DOWN, BUT NOT DEAD

CLASSIFIED BY: TJACOBSON, AMBASSADOR, STATE, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Tajikistan's political parties are slowly getting back on their feet after being completely marginalized in the November 2006 presidential election. In a series of meetings with party leaders in January and February 2007, PolOff discussed each party's direction leading up to the 2010 parliamentary elections. The Democratic Party of Tajikistan informed PolOff of key developments, including the move of its chairman from a holding cell to a bona fide prison and the likelihood of a resolution to the party's internal strife. A new political movement led by an exiled Tajik journalist in Moscow is making claims in the media it aims to peacefully overthrow the government. Although Tajik political parties suffered a moral setback in the last election, the field is still active. END SUMMARY.

#### PARTIES REFOCUS ON THEIR BASES

¶2. (SBU) Members of the Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan in Dushanbe and Khujand admitted that after the presidential election, the government has loosened its monitoring and pressure on political parties. They predict that in the next few years, political parties will be more openly active. The Social Democratic Party plans to focus on strengthening its own party and reaching out to the people by building up its services. It will open a new women's department and protect social rights by organizing lawyers in Khujand and Khatlon to provide advice on civil rights.

¶3. (SBU) The Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan is also redirecting its focus. In previous years, its base was comprised of Tajikistan's Muslims and the party reached out to Islamic nations. It will now shift its programs to attract the intelligentsia and ally itself with Western and Eastern nations, not only those with Islamic populations. The Islamic Renaissance Party's biggest concern this year is to see its former chairman, Said Abdullo Nuri, honored as a state hero during celebrations of the 10-year anniversary of the signing of the peace agreement. Nuri was instrumental in reaching the agreement which ended the Tajik Civil War. The party will also introduce a new draft law on religion to supplant the controversial draft law circulated, but not passed in 2006.

14. (C) The government's pocket parties, the Communist Party of Tajikistan, the Agrarian Party of Tajikistan, the Party of Economic Reform and the registered Socialist Party of Tajikistan continue to support President Rahmonov's agenda. Rahmonov's own political party, the People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan has become bolder after it reaffirmed its dominance in the November presidential election and February local bi-elections. Muso Asozoda, Head of Administration for the People's Democratic Party openly admits the party will never support the Islamic Renaissance Party, but is willing to work with other parties. He stated that Tajikistan's transition period has passed and the peace process is now part the past.

#### ISKANDAROV- OUT OF DETENTION AND INTO JAIL

15. (SBU) Rahmatullo Valiev, Democratic Party of Tajikistan's Deputy Chairman and de facto head, called PolOff into his office February 18 to inform PolOff that security officials moved the Democratic Party of Tajikistan's Chairman, Mahmmadruzzi Iskandarov, from his isolated detention cell at the Ministry of Security to a prison specifically for government workers convicted of crimes. Iskandarov was detained in April 2005 and formally convicted in October 2005 for various crimes such as corruption and embezzlement. Although some convictions may be legitimate, consensus among the international community indicates the trial was politically motivated and that authorities kidnapped him from Moscow and brought him back to Dushanbe to stand trial. Authorities stated they will permit Iskandarov's brothers to visit him in a few weeks time.

#### THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY WITHOUT ISKANDAROV

16. (SBU) After Iskandarov's imprisonment, the Democratic Party of Tajikistan faced internal strife that threatened to ruin the party he built. Prior to the November 2006 presidential

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election, the Ministry of Justice sent a letter to the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda recognizing a faction of the Democratic Party led by Masud Sobirov as the official party.

However, Sobirov was never properly elected chairman by the party.

17. (C) Valiev told PolOff that he has been meeting with Deputy Minister of Justice Rustam Mengliev to discuss his party's legal status. Mengliev urged the Democratic Party to take the issue to court and promised that the issue would be settled in Valiev's favor. He admitted that the Ministry of Justice made a mistake in registering the first split-away faction of the party and would restore the party to Valiev. Mengliev allegedly refused a \$50,000 bribe from Saidjavhar Ismonov, who also wanted to take over leadership of the Democratic Party. Ismonov's registration was denied by the Ministry of Justice after he openly admitted to bribing the Ministry.

18. (C) Valiev told PolOff the party congress will meet in the summer to establish a new strategy, including electing a new chairman. He is currently in discussion with potential financiers.

19. (C) COMMENT: Valiev's sudden positive relationship with the Ministry of Justice begs the question: what is Mengliev receiving in return for agreeing to register Valiev's Democratic Party faction? The decision to find a new chairman and a partnership with the notorious Ministry of Justice may mean a closer relationship to the government. Given the government's strategy of creating pocket parties, the Democratic Party could be its next victim. Valiev previously touted that the government created the split-away factions of the party to attempt to create a Democratic Party with allegiance to Rahmonov. In the end, the government managed to get Valiev's faction of the party to work with it and may end up marginalizing Iskandarov. END COMMENT.

"PATRIOTS" ON THE MOVE

¶10. (U) In an interview published on Fergana.ru, Dodojon Atoulloev revealed a new opposition movement named Vatandor (Patriot) aimed at deposing President Rahmonov. The movement's motto is "New way, new power, new ideas and new life." Atoulloev claims that former ministers, former Prime Ministers, members of the Parliament and other influential leaders belong to the movement, though he declined to name names, citing security reasons. Members allegedly secretly met in London, Berlin, Washington DC, Tashkent, Almaty and Moscow. After ousting Rahmonov, the movement members would like to set up a pluralistic, democratic government with free and fair elections. In the interview, Atoulloev criticized Rahmonov's authoritarian rule and corrupt inner circle. Atoulloev insists that the movement will work within the framework of the law to overthrow Rahmonov.

¶11. (C) Atoulloev is an independent journalist who has lived in Moscow since 1992. Atoulloev informed Embassy sources that he has met with Mahmud Khudaiberdiyev on several occasions. Khudaiberdiyev, a former Colonel, attempted to stage an uprising in the Sughd region in 1998. After failing, he allegedly retreated to Uzbekistan, to continue training his troops for a future coup. Tajik journalists based in Moscow have claimed that in the past few months Khudaiberdiyev has been on the lookout for a politician to lead a political party after he overthrows the current government. (COMMENT: Given Atoulloev's connections with Khudaiberdiyev and recent news that Khudaiberdiyev is ready to attempt another coup in Tajikistan, he could be one of the influential figures behind Vatandor. END COMMENT.)

¶12. (C) COMMENT: Rahmonov has successfully consolidated power and has no reason to fear any of the traditional, registered political parties. Vatandor is not likely to be any more successful at opposing the administration than the others. However, Khudaiberdiyev has long been a boogey-man and source of concern for Rahmonov and his security apparatus and if he is truly behind Vatandor, the Tajik government may react strongly to eliminate the threat. Ironically, it is precisely due to the Rahmonov's clampdown and failure of Tajikistan's political parties to play a meaningful role in politics and society that leads to movements such as Vatandor. END COMMENT.  
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